

It's So Simple

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Summary: When engaged in what seems to be hopeless combat, a soldier's thoughts run rampant, driven by adrenaline, pain, and fear. Memories of his father come to him, and he reflects on them during the crazy calm that accompanies fighting for one's life.

It's So Simple

Where the fuck is everybody?

>Fucked if I know, and fucked if I've got the time to figure that out.
All I know is that the drop went bad from the start, that we lost three people in atmo, and my S.O.I.E.V. landed way the fuck off course, so instead of behind the front lines, or at the front lines.

>I'm deep into enemy territory, and steadily running out of ammunition.
I'm in enemy territory for the fifth time in four days, and running off four hours of sleep and stimulants.

>I'm in enemy territory, and no body's listening.
I'm screaming into my comms, trying to get anyone to answer, trying to raise anyone to lend me a hand here| as I try to run for my fucking life.

>No answer.
No answer.

>Skid around a corner, keep running. Try to duck inside what's left of a building, meet an Elite face to face.
Fire, point blank.

>Drop Elite, keep running.
Sometimes, I think God has a twisted ass sense of humor. Either that, or a twisted ass sense of justice, of the workings of the universal logic behind crime and punishment. Sometimes, I think that maybe confession doesn't really absolve us of all our sins, and that twists of fate like these are God's way of making us pay for all that we've done.

>Round a corner, pain lances into my back. Yeah, wondered when that was coming. I didn't expect to make it out of this as pretty and pristine as I came into it.
I've been shot before. Hell, it was getting shot that got me out of the life I led before the military. Getting shot hurts, bullets take your breath away| but it's nothing compared to the feeling of your own skin melting, the scent of it

being burned away by blue-hot plasma.

>Stagger, keep running.
Oh, Papi, I should have listened to you, when I was a kid.

>"Listen up, hijo, because I'm only gonna tell you this one time. You go to school, you finish, and you go to college. Or you drop out, you get a job, and you start makin' money for yourself and your mama and me. You don't do nothin' without havin' a plan, hijo, and a way out."

>So instead, I ran with the gangs in the barrio, Papi, and I dropped out of school. I never had any respect for you Papiâ€¦ I'm sorry. Butâ€¦It helped us all, it helped you, me, Mama, and everybody else. It got you and Mama a job, it kept food on our table, it kept our street from getting shot upâ€¦
But I disappointed you so much, Papiâ€¦

>Jump for cover, get sent end over end when another shot hits the leg. That's going to make this hard, now isn't it?
I remember the night we sat down, Papi, to have a talk.

>How you brought out two shots, rimmed in salt, your bottle of tequila, and the limes, and sat down next to me on the steps.
"â€¦ Guess there's nothing I can tell you now, is there hijo? You know it all, got it all figured out."

>I remember I looked at you, Papi, and I didn't say anything. You wouldn't look at me, not in the eyes anyways. You never did, back then.
"You're a man now, hijo, I guess. Or at least, you think you're one. You think you're a man, and a better man than me, yeah?"

>I remember looking at you, and I said yes.
"Well, you might be hijo, and then you might not be. I don't have your respect, I never have, and I never deserved it in the past, hijo. But I've tried my best to do right by you and your Mama and tus hermanos."

>You poured the drinks like an artist, Papi. Two glasses in one hand, poured the tequila in a single, gleaming streamâ€¦ flipped the bottle as you rotated the glasses in your palm, then filled the other one.
"But I ain't never killed a man either, hijo, to get ahead in the world. And if that's what you have to do to get ahead, I think I'll stay right where I am."

>Its getting harder to run, Papi â€" my leg, my backâ€¦ they hurt so bad.
I round a corner, and I know I've fucked up.

>All I see is a dead end.
I slam my back against it, so they can't take me from behind.

>Papi, why can't I stop thinking about you?
"So, hijo, the least you can do is sit here and have a drink with me, yeah? You made yourself into a man. Least I can do, I guess, is finish the job by having your first drink with you."

>You showed me how to drink tequila, Papi.
Salt. Shot. Suck.

>Lick the salt. Take the shot. Suck the lime.
I can see the Elites at the mouth of the alley now, Papi.

>They've got their swords. They want to play with me.
"Good, yeah, hijo? Don't hit it too hard, or too much, or you'll end up like me, I guess. And that's not what you need, hijo. You already make your Mama cry enough, you don't need to make her cry anymore."

>Mamaâ€¦
Mama, Papi, my rifle just clicked. It's empty.

>Sometimes, you learn things that are valuable later in life, running with the gangs in the barrio.
Like how to be the meanest sonofabitch in the world with knives.

>I draw two, long, black-steel serrated vengeance, and wait. That's the best and sometimes the worst move that a knife fighter can make,

is waiting to see what your opponent is going to do.
I remember the night that the priest called you and Mama to the church, Papi.

>When the priest showed you in, you saw me praying for the first time since I was a little boy.
Mama called me a miracle, but Papi, you were so much more realistic.

>You sat me down, on those steps again, a couple nights later. And again, you brought us the tequila... I can remember it so well.
"â€| Hijo, if you're thinking God reached down to save you, you're not only desperatado, but muy tonto."

>He places his hand on my shoulder, pulls me close.
"â€| Your Mama wants to send you away. To school, to relatives, anywhere you'll be safe. She's trying to see that you get sent to the priests, she says that you want to go to them, to become one of them, yeah?"

>I nod to him.
"â€| Well, I think you're looking for something that's not really there, hijo. But it's safest for you."

>I don't say a word.
"â€| I'm not stupid, hijo. You might think I am, but I'm not. I finished high school, hijo, before my Papi, your abuelo, died. I might have been able to be something more, hijo, but instead I had to support tu abuela, y mis hermanos. Then I met your Mama, and we did things we shouldn't have, and well, I married her before you were born because it was the right thing to do."_

>I don't speak. You've never told me this, Papi.
"Before you were born, Rafael, I was so mad at her. But when they put you in my arms, and I held youâ€| I learned something that changed me. I learned what it meant to help bring a life into the world, hijo, and I learned how fragile that life can be. How much I wanted to protect you from everything I'd ever known growing up."

>You pour the tequila, but I don't move away.
Then you hand me the shotglass, and you look me in the eyes for the first time in yearsâ€| And suddenly I realize why.

>Because in your eyes, Papi, I see myself, I see how you see meâ€| and I realize that all these years, you see me for what I am.
A little boy, a stupid kid, trying to be a man.

>"â€| You didn't make it easy, hijo. You've always been a know-it-all. Your Mama hasn't made it easy either, always trusting in God to protect you. So in the end, maybe it's for the best that you and her find out that, sometimes, bad things happen to people. You could have died, hijo, but instead you got lucky and you lived. And now's your chance to straighten out. I told your Mama I'll pay whatever we have to, I'll work another job or two, if it means we can send you to seminary. Maybe you'll become a priest. Maybe you won't. But either way, I hope you find out what you want to do with your life, hijo, because gangs lead to the grave or to prison and no where else."

>I think, maybe, you're here with me, Papi.
The knives dance in the red light of a planet being destroyed by war. They dance again and again, around shields, through shields. Plasma held together by God knows what comes at me again and again, close enough that I can feel the heat, but I dance around it like my knives.

>Three Elites down, Papi.
And more to go.

>I remember when I finished seminary, when I told you what I wanted to do with my life.
Mama was angry. You didn't say a word. You just said what you always said. That you supported me, supported my decisions.

>Maybe you didn't think I could make it back then.
There were no solemn conversations over tequila shots, the night before I left for boot camp. There were no goodbyes. There were no words of wisdom to help me along the way, because I think you didn't know what to say. You didn't want to say anything, maybe, because you were afraid that

you would stop what was happening.

>I remember that boot was hardâ€¦
>I remember that I used to cry at night, and how badly I wanted to come homeâ€¦

>But then it got better. And as quickly as it got better, it was overâ€¦ before I knew it, you were both sitting in the grandstands, and I was out on the parade grounds, marching with my unit at our graduation.
>I remember seeing you both afterwards.

>How Mama started to cry, and how you looked me in the eyesâ€¦
>How I knew that, in that moment, I was a man. Because you looked at me in the eyes, and all I saw was your pride.

>I remember you hugged me, and what you said to me meant more than anything.
>_"You're a man now, hijo. And I'm so proud of you."_

>Luck's starting to run out, Papi.
>I'm burning, bleeding, from what feels like a hundred nicks and cuts. I'm tired, I hurt, and the stimulants we all took before the drop are starting to wear off. The adrenaline is starting to wear off.

>It hurts.
>Sometimes, when I think I'm going to die, Papi, I think of you.

>I wonder what it was like for you, when Sigma Octanus IV fell.
>Mirna and the others got off, I know that.

>Mama died a little while after.
>But they said you died making sure they could escape.

>I wonder what it was like for you, Papi. I wonder how you fought them, what you did to make sure that they couldn't come after the lives you helped to bring into the world. You told me once you would do anything you could to protect those livesâ€¦ And you did, you gave your life for them.
>I remember the last time you talked to me, Papiâ€¦ Two days before Sigma Octanus IV fell.

>"Your Mama and I are thinking about moving somewhere else, hijo. With the money you send us, with tus hermanos working, we think we can move them all away from here. Somewhere nicer, somewhere safer. Because I want the best for all of you, hijo."
I look at you, I smile and I offer as much assistance as I can with money.

>"No, hijo, you do so much already. Your Mama and I, we've been looking at nicer places, in nicer parts of the city. We're gonna do it soon as we find a place, I think. Your Mama isn't happy, says that she raised you all here and she wants to stay, but she knows, I think, that its time we moved somewhere better, for the littler kids. Things around here are just getting worse all the time, hijo. But lets not talk about that anymore, si? What about you, how are you? And in Spanish, hijo, you need to remember where you come from."

>I had to go, Papi, because we were getting called for our drills. I said I'd call you back.
>But I didn't.

>And then you were gone.
>I wonder if that disappointed you, Papi.

>You always worried that someday, I'd turn out like Mirna did. She got married, she moved somewhere nice with her white husband, and she tried her best to be a white lady, never spoke Spanish again. She said it embarrassed her, that it made people think she was as ignorant as the rest of our family.
>You always wanted me to spend half our conversations in Spanishâ€¦ but that last time, we never did.

>I wonder if you thought about me before you died.
>I can't fight anymore, Papi.

>I'm pinned to a wall, with a blade burning it's way through my body, with an Elite staring me in the eyes. I wonder if it can see me through my visor. I wonder if it can see that I'm tired, and that I'm crying because I miss my mother and my father so much that it hurts.

That I'm crying because I think I'm going to die alone here, just like you did back home, and that no one will ever find my body either.
I'm crying because I'm wondering if maybe you were right. Maybe God didn't have anything to do with my being lucky.
>If maybe, things do just happen for no reason at all, or that maybe all the work I've done to redeem myself in God's eyes, was really for nothing.
I'm falling to my knees. It pulled the sword out of me, and I'm on my knees. It hurts so much, I can't even breathe.
>But I just heard the most beautiful thing in the world, Papi.
I can hear gunfire, coming closer.
>I can hear voices over my comms again.
Did you send them to find me, Papi?
>I think that you did.
I love you, Papi.

End
file.